Wilfred Hamann

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WH: Wilfred Hamann, better known as Willie Hamann. Born in 1923. Outside of about three years in the service I lived here all my life. I don't put me as a newcomer. We've seen a lot of changes.

DO: You were talking to me earlier about you had the horse team was there and you had the header.

WH: My dad was farming in…he had an action sale in '28 and sold all his horse equipment. At that time it wasn't very well going land contract. The guy that bought in 1930, '31 he took bankruptcy and turned the place back to us. The meantime we moved into Island City in '28 and built a house up there. So I lived from about the time I was six years old until I got out of the service in '45, '46. I lived in Island built a house in there. Then '56 we bought adjoining…what we call my dad's place, an old meeting place. We built out here and moved out in 1964.

DO: So you were in Island City for how long?

WH: Roughly twenty some odd years. At that time Island City we had a population of about sixty to sixty-eight. At that time you could…one reason Dad moved into Island you could have a cow and we had our chicken and a garden.

DO: And that was in the '50s?

WH: That was in the '30s.

DO: '30s.

WH: Yea.

DO: You had an old picture of the church in Island City. It is now the Farm Bureau. Did you go to that church?

WH: Yea, it was kind of a nondenominational or hit-and-a-miss. It was all the churches. Finally it kinda gave out because the population just wasn't there. I tell you, if haven't interviewed her yet, Kurt Blocklin's mother. She had a…Charlie her son, she played the piano. We had Sunday School. Sometimes we had a minister and sometimes we didn't. Mrs. VanBlocklin. She probably could tell you more Island City history at church and cause she was…she still teaches music I guess, at ninety-something years old. Grand old lady.

DO: How long has it been since the old mill there, the one that's left, has been active?

WH: That was active until shortly after the Second World War. Somebody can tell you more dates on that. Quite a bit after. They pulled the flour machinery out and just made a peat mill out of it. It used to run with water power most of the time. There was an old…through Island City nobody uses it, but there's this been old water pipe about four feet in diameter. It goes under the highway and up toward Island. Of course in the summertime they'd run out of water and have to go electricity. Pelting wheel there.

DO: I never knew that. A four foot diameter pipe.

WH: At least. It still is that steel pipe. It was a wooden pipe, like I said, but after the War they got a bunch of color pipe and put it in. It went under the railroad track and the ditch come out there…we used to call it Fred Leonard's, I don't know

who's up there running dirt…about where RD Mack's pond is up there but they took the water out and it went through the pelting wheel. The old line shaft still in the mill if you could get in there. I'm pretty sure. The pelting wheel is gone.

DO: What shack?

WH: Raised it up here and the water dropped through what they called a pelting wheel and it made the power. The water went on down the tailrace.

DO: Then back in the river?

WH: Back in the river. That was cheap power.

DO: I never knew that.

WH: They run that mill for flour until right at the first of June. They shut down for about a month and clean it up and overhaul. Send the rolls to Portland and get them regrooved. It was around the clock. When they made flour they'd run seven days a week. 'cause the start up and the stop. Supposedly they made pretty good flour.

DO: I imagine that pipe runs right under the highway then.

WH: Oh yea. One time in Union County we had…Union had the flour mill and they finally shut down. Island City was the last one. La Grande burnt down, you know. Kit owned that eventually. There in the '30s…I was this little kid there…they got a big contract for flour to go to China so the started up the old La Grande mill. It made kind of a poor grade flour. They got us kids up there to help the old millwright. We had on old rubber hammer and beat on the elevators and knocked the mice out and cleaned it up a bit and then he went to making flour. That's probably the last time it run in the middle '30s. Union run a little later than that. I don't know just when it discontinued. Somebody over there, Krausers or some of them could probably tell you more about that.

DO: I wonder why we had so many mills and then they just didn't make it.

WH: Even Cove had a flour mill. I don't know why people quit. And now, what it is, state of Oregon two flour mills left. Pendleton and in Portland.

DO: I guess they just got bigger and bigger and consolidated.

WH: Yea. It would take them there in Island…it would take them two days to load a car of flour. They'd car it out. It all went in a railroad car and it was all exported. It went to Portland and then go on ships. Either go around the canals to the east coast or to the Hawaiian Island and the Philippines.

DO: In a mill you were talking about it didn't make very good flour in La Grande. What makes a good flour and a bad flour.

WH: How your rolls are set up. See, the first flour wasn't even bleached. It wasn't very white. They got more sieves, better sieves. Old Bud Jones he worked up there. I don't know if they were still making flour when he worked up there or not. I don't know if you've interviewed or not.

DO: No, I know Bud, though.

WH: He's quite a history buff. He's got a lot on this…he's done a lot of work on this state ditch.

DO: Yea, and I want to know more about that. He lives…he's right adjacent to the ditch.

WH: Yea. We're on the ditch too, I assure you.

DO: Let me stop that.

WH: There's a contract job a fellow names Hoodman.
DO: This is the state ditch we're speaking of here. It's about four feet wide…
WH: And roughly four feet deep, more or less. Doug…
DO: With a scraper?
WH: I think the state put up $15,000 to do that. It was from here to Imbler. It isn't very far. History Bud got …it was five or seven miles long and took out near a hundred miles old river.
DO: Yea, it took out a lot of river. I've seen the maps, seen the photos. It's pretty interesting.
WH: Yea. Now they…
DO: But it cut off so much river that it cut so deep that it keeps going deeper and deeper and deeper.
WH: That is kind of debatable. It's hard pack. We've been down there…we're pumping out of one when we camp. Late in the fall you get down there and that stuff is worse than this pavement for being hard. We've even tried to make a stump hold of section, you know. But it fills. Eventually we wear…I always call it alkali, but the micracross call it Crater Lake Ash. In fact, they got some pictures on that state dish you can see each layer of…when Crater Lake blew evidently ash come here and settled on the water and settled down and it'd be a white layer. I call it alkali, but they call it Crater Lake ash.
DO: We had a place over on Gekeler Lane and we had plenty of hard sand there.
WH: Yea.
DO: Did they ever have to…did they periodically dredge that ditch?
WH: No.
DO: They just dug it once and that was it.
WH: That was it. Like I say, the farmers built…took out some more additional ponds on their own. Each farmer…matter of fact they made a drainage district out of that thing. Each farmer was assessed two bits an acre or something and he was allowed to work so much of it out of it. I don't know, two and a half or three bucks a day if you had a team. ___Swede, we'd call it. Atkins. He was from Baker. They didn't have a transit, but they took an old two by six with a hand level and they'd site and take a mark. That's the way they…but it did wind around well up there at Pierce Bridge. It wound all through that country there and into…well, Borden Chemical Company and that was all…in matter of fact, brush there, acres and acres…they hauled a lot of gravel out of there. Your college was all old Joe Harrison and some of those guys teams and they'd haul maybe two or three loads a day on the wagons. Coming out with a number two shovel and haul it up there and dump it.
DO: Oh boy. A lot of work.
WH: A lot of work. Then old Pierce, the old Pierce land there…of course the old saying is it took them about three deals to go broke. They sold two cattle and bought high price sheep. They sold cheap sheep and brought high price hogs. [laugh] Anyway, they left them hogs down there on that brush and that. When we were little kids we didn't go below Pierce Bridge because them old wild hogs would take you. They was mean.
DO: Did they put them in there to clean it out?

WH: No, they just let them…
DO: Let them run.
WH: Let them run. In matter of fact, during the Depression a couple of farmers here decided to eat some pork. They went up there and crawled through the brush and one of the old guy up the tree. They finally shot a hog or two and dressed it out. I guess the meat was so tough and strong they couldn't eat it. They had a little tusk…the kids brought a tusk there about that long to school. [laugh]
DO: They were wild.
WH: Yea, we called…they were the best kid wild ones.
DO: Was there ever much of a hog industry here in the valley?
WH: At times, yes. the old boys that bought this place they come from Illinois in 1902. They bought 400 acres. One, two, three, four. Then he put up this house. That house was up in 1903. The old man he said, "Give me ten good sows and I'll lift the mortgage on any place." Lot of the grain went back into the hogs and they sold the hogs twice a year.
DO: How about slaughter houses?
WH: La Grande cause …in matter of fact, that safe right there…the old packing plant. That thing moved it down and then Elers ran the packing plant and then they went…Claude Wright got it. The guy looked at that, "You know, I helped move that safe from the old Grande Ronde Lumber Company. We used to get paid in pay envelopes with gold coins in them days." A lot of money went through that. We just use it for a fireproof box. Quite an old antique.
DO: This is a beautiful old safe we're looking at in Willy's office. Got the old pictures on it and scrollwork.
WH: I wish I hadn't have painted the outside of it. It probably…
DO: Probably looked just like that.
WH: Its been moved. That thing is heavy.
DO: You keep the family jewels in that baby. [laughter]
WH: I'm going to tell her that! There's one other thing, I don't know if anyone has mentioned the old railroad that went from Union to Summerville and was going to go to Walla Walla angles across Hunt Grade.
DO: No. The old Hunt Grade, huh? Nobody ever said anything about it.
WH: That's something to be researched. They got tracks about as far as…it went into Cove, barely, and it run a few years there. It never did get the rails on it. The old aerial photos you can see it right across the valley. They had quite a grade, but never got any ties or rails on it.
DO: They just had the grade?
WH: Yea, but they did get as far as Cove. They hauled a few cherries and a little fruit out there a time or two. The old Hunt…I don't know if promotion scheme, or what. I've got a cousin down here along the…it made quite a cut through the ridge there and its still there. Mabel Hammits.
DO: Was there ever any fruit industry here right in the middle of the valley? It was always up on the hills?
WH: Except when you get over here on Booth Lane and there's quite a few full orchards there. A lot of them didn't come out till the Second World War in the '40s.

DO: Apples or cherries?
WH: Apples, predominantly. Most of those old apples in them days went to La Grande to the old cider mill.
DO: Where was that?
WH: Across from the old flour mill.
DO: That's down there by the garbage recycle center?
WH: Yea, I think that's about right where the cider mill.
DO: I remember when that mill burned. That wasn't that long ago.
WH: No.
DO: The water table used to be a lot higher out here.
WH: Well, not really. Domestic wells we could go down…most of the first wells were drilled around 100 to 150 feet for domestic water. For irrigation wells we run out of gravel around 250 feet and run into blue clay. We're pumping pretty current water. So far, we've got our fingers crossed, we haven't run into a water shortage. When we drilled the well here the geologic survey come in and drilled an observation well beside it. They rented a pump for a month. Put meters on house wells every quarter of a mile where they could. They pumped the stabilizer and they got what they call a depression. They figured we could pump wells within a half mile of each other without having any effect on them. Then they run some carbon data on it and they figured we was pumping pretty current water.
DO: Good.
WH: There out in Imbler, there's artesian wells, a lot of them. Some of them are deep. The deeper you go the warmer your water. They definitely Finley Creek fault up there goes into the ground then comes up. We're not on …we're on the Grande Ronde fault, but they never pinpointed it. They just don't know where its disappearing up there and coming up here.
DO: There's probably a lot of water under here.
WH: Must be. The bureaucrats they've done some…off of Gekeler, everything south of us, when I was a kid we called that the desert.
DO: Everything south?
WH: Yea, of Cove highway here. Sagebrush and…old Connley…or Reynolds…they had some sheep barns there. Bureaucrats said there really should be more wells in that area there and lower the water table and leach the salts down, pull that alkali down and improve the ground. And it has, definitely.
DO: That Connley Lake, that's always pretty much been a lake area?
WH: Just a seep. Yea. Over here and in the last couple years there hasn't been anything in it. It used to be that we had quite a time with Schwans coming in. Come into the field and pull out lemonade. Some of the old ASC maps, here on Standwater south of me, it would flood. They called it Peach Lake. It would flood and then the water couldn't get away. The old boys here, when they'd come here, the old man would set them out there with a net after the water went down. The old carp was swimming in there. They'd get out the carp and then bring them home and chop them up and feed them to the pigs. Charlie said that was a dirty, nasty job. It is on some of the old maps, called Peach Lake.
DO: Peach Lake. Peach Lake. So how far was that south from Wizar's?

WH: Only about a half mile in on Wizar's little place. When the river would get so high it would just fill up and then it wouldn't get up, you know.

DO: Down there on Wright Lane…is that Wright Lane…I think its Wright Lane where there's that big old slough that goes through there. Is that the old river?

WH: It could be. When you cross it here going to Cove, that's the old Grande Ronde River, too. It's called Catherine Creek here. We're just wound up back through there. Where the Grande Ronde and Catherine went in I don't know exactly. Somewhere on Connley's down in there.

DO: You got wind breaks out here.

WH: That really makes a difference. My neighbor Bob he was loading a basket and brought in little seedlings. The game commission and …cedars won't grow here. They are the best wind breakers in the low growing state. Now we got a lot of volunteers. The males and females and they'll eat the seeds. We got scattered here and there and we're getting cedars. Everybody talks about the wind, but I say that's just a breeze we have. This little house, that I was born in, right south, they broke that field up before I was born. That was the First World War. It was sagebrush and it blew all winter. Mom…you know those old square houses…our kitchen and that was in the back end and she covered the windows. I remember packing water in off the well. She put a cheesecloth on the water bucket. The plates were turned over and you quick turned the plates over and filled them up and eat because the dirt would blow so bad.

DO: If there's nothing to hold it down in the winter it's going to do nothing but blow. What have you seen changes in crops?

WH: We're going to strictly dry land farming…that's where we raised a crop every other year, summer fallow…to irrigation. Everything we raise, grain, whether its barley, wheat or oats, they bred up and we're getting higher yields. More of them for irrigation than they are for dry land. Instead of buying land we spend more money to make less.

DO: On the same amount. Yea, spend more money to make less.

WH: Like hay, used to get one good cutting of hay and maybe a piece of one and that was it. Now we can get three good cuttings of hay with water. It's made a tremendous… then we get into rotation. We started in on green peas and of course they went out. Between grass and grain and mint now and our cereal crops.

DO: When did irrigation first start to really be big.

WH: Around Island City and that area you irrigated some in old 1850/60 rights, you know, ditch water. It didn't come out here in the valley at all until about '45/'46. We started irrigation peas. Lamb Weston come here…

DO: With sprinklers, not flood irrigation.

WH: No, we're not level enough. We started sprinklers and then put it on river water and creek water. Then we got crazy and started drilling wells. Stan and I put in the first wells in this area.

DO: How deep?

WH: 250 feet, roughly.

DO: Not far to go really for irrigation water.

WH: We're pumping twelve to fifteen hundred gallons a minute on them wells. Especially on a dry year like this it makes a difference whether you got some…we got some ground here we don't irrigate because the creeks in the road and can't get wheel lines and hand lines, so we still summer fallow some. Probably always will. We call our center pivots now…we call our dry corners. You can see they're starting to burn up already because lack of water and that's summer fallow.

DO: Then you put wheat in them every other year?

WH: Yea and some of them, like the neighbor here, put a little piece alfalfa just to get out of his hair…pull up equipment for a corner here and a corner.

DO: When did circles first start making it big here?

WH: It's been fifteen or twenty years ago. The first circles. Now its all low volume, low pressure. Saving water. They've improved the circles quite a bit.

DO: I say one…somebody…Red's father-in-law…

WH: Who?

DO: Paul Red's father-in-law?

WH: Krestin Shaw?

DO: Krestin Shaw. He had a set up there that would get corners.

WH: Yea, corner catchers. Its an elaborate…

DO: It pivoted right there by his house. It would swing around and you'd think maybe it was going to hit his house. If it didn't work it would have it his house.

WH: We've got one here that catches all but just a little bit of the corner. You catch a…you bury a sensing wire. It comes around and senses that and pulls that end tower up and cuts the water off then as it comes around it goes out.

DO: Its pretty slick, but it works.

WH: They're getting pretty good.

DO: Are you doing grass seed now?

WH: Yea. We will be. We maintain about 250 or 200 acres of grass. Then about the same of mint. The rest of it is alfalfa and cereal crops.

DO: Bluegrass?

WH: Straight bluegrass. In a normal year at Fourth of July we're swathing grass. This year its going to be two weeks or ten days later. I'm just guessing. You're starting to see a little tinge get to it now.

DO: So just from the really cold spring?

WH: Cold spring and….yea. Pappy used to tell me that he never looked at the calendar. When something was ready to go, it was ready to go. For twenty years we've raised grass and haven't missed many Fourth of Julys that we haven't started swathing. It depends on the type and variety of grass.

DO: You do bluegrass before fesking.

WH: We're straight bluegrass, but sometimes some of your dry land fesking will come on quite a bit earlier. Out there on Gekeler Lane, Paul Ruddy's got some on his, some on __. They'll probably be earlier. Some of them starting to fall down now. This last wind and little bit of rain put quite a bit of it down.

DO: I just used to live there east of Brud.

WH: There's where something has…he's really done a job on that, especially south of his house. I call it old Ronansky's place that he bought where he put in the center fence.
DO: He's done a really good job on that.
WH: Years and years ago I'm not so sure that…old Claude __ will tell you there was a race track out there. They races motorcycles and they raced horses.
DO: This was at the corner of Gekeler and Pierce?
WH: Yea, out there in that alkali field as we called it.
DO: That's like right in back of Pace's place. They had a motorcycle track?
WH: I think they used a dual purpose. Whatever happened to be…
DO: Horse race, horse track. I was told by Pays one time that he used to ice skate out there in the winter. He said that used to be flooded a lot more and he used to ice skate out there in the winter.
WH: Talking about ice skating. When I was a kid there in Island on a hard winter we could skate from Island City to La Grande park.
DO: Really!
WH: One winter, we had a hard winter, and the road was slicked over and nobody could get to school. But we all could get down to the river to go ice skating, even the principal! Once in a while there would be a few little ripples and kind of hard ice to skate on. There were several ponds and we just skated from Island City to La Grande park.
DO: People don't do that much anymore.
WH: No. I think last year…we keep a little water here in the creek. Usually our best ice skating has been between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Then we get snow on it.
DO: Then it wrecks it.
WH: Snow and dirt. I used to be…kids like there in Island we skated all in sloughs. Bake of Borks and Steins and on the river.
DO: Was there any big community center in Island City where there were dances or anything like that, or dinners?
WH: The church. The big dinner was Memorial Day and then used to be Election Day we'd have a big dinner. They'd be fund raisers for the cemetery or something like that. It was always held at the church. After the Farm Bureau took over… a lot of square dancing at the old church…they bought the old church. It is still owned by the Farm Bureau, I think, its just rented…
DO: When was that about, do you know?
WH: That hasn't been over fifteen years ago.
DO: Is that all?
WH: They used to do a lot of square dancing there. Taught square dancing. Now, if I remember, just like your Elks and all your clubs people don't go.
DO: Don't go. I guess too much TV. [laughter]
WH: I hate the tube.
DO: Everybody hates it, but everybody watches it. Terrible.
WH: This old house was put up in 1903, same year your courthouse was. Everybody's been in this remodeling thing. When my son-in-law wanted to move out…[end tape]

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WH: …you're courthouse was. Now what's your courthouse worth. You're just tearing it down. That was a brick building on a stone foundation. That has no bearing on it. I knew it wouldn't. I had to give her a bad time.
DO: You were just pulling her leg. She deserves it.
WH: Yea. See this old shed as you come by?
DO: Uh huh.
WH: That should have been down two or three years ago. The old boys…that was put up about 1905…they bought some old buildings up at Perry when the mill went out there. Tore them down and hauled this lumber down and put up that shed. Charlie said that road from La Grande to Perry was nothing but niggerheads. You'd just bounce…come back with a load of lumber you'd be bouncing around and lose a few boards.
DO: Now this is just a real rough road with really big rocks in it, right?
WH: Yea, he called them niggerheads. He'd get up here before daylight and head up and load up and be dark when they got back home. Everybody wants to buy that old shed for the lumber, but it ain't worth nothing. Its all warped.
DO: I learned. On our place we had a bit old two-story house and we were going to tear it…it tore it down. We thought we'd salvage all sorts of wood out it. You don't get much out of it.
WH: This shed was built off a big old two-story barn that we had out there on the ranch. Dad tore it down. It had nice bats on it. That was about 1935. I hated to see that old barn down. It was better than the house was. It was a big barn. It would hold a hundred ton of hay, at least, all above ground.
DO: Saw mills. Was there a saw mill in Island City?
WH: Not a big one. We had a …during the Depression down there where that junkyard is at. A fellow names Albert Smith come in from Missouri and had a little deal there. He run it off and on. It was a little circle mill. Never had no commercial mills.
DO: Circle mill?
WH: Just a circle saw.
DO: Okay, not a ban saw.
WH: Made more saw dust. I think I see now advertised these new ban saws. If you use a big a saw…if you saw an inch lumber every three saws you save a board by ban saw over a circle mill.
DO: No kidding.
WH: The circle the bigger the skirt was. [tape glitch] The museum over there…
DO: There aught to be. I know Jack Evans he might know something about that.
WH: There's enough grade…come through my field over here. They had to knock it down to farm over the thing even. It was just a pretty good grade. That was all done with horses and strip scrapers. Then there was another one they tell me that just run in the summertime…I never read too much about it…from Walla Walla to Sumpter there. It was called the old Daily Road. It went across the hills up there.

DO: To Sumpter, yea.

WH: They used to run it in the summertime because the snow was too deep in the wintertime. The old Daily Road. I haven't even seen it on any of the maps.

DO: How about changes in insecticides, pesticides, chemicals over the years?

WH: That's something that…

DO: Did you start out using arson knuckles?

WH: No. The only thing we used when I started farming was for treating grain we used…my dad used formaldehyde and a cup of carbate for smut control. Then we went to __mercury, which is outlawed. Now we're in I don't know what.

DO: It gets complicated now, doesn't it?

WH: Yea. Since I kind of retired I don't try to keep up on chemicals and fertilizer. Things are so complicated. Even Pete ___ tries to keep up. Well, we've got Nagras that we've hired. He checks our fields, especially mint and grass. He counts the bugs and tells us what we've got.

DO: See if we can talk some about the grass seed industry and how its developed over the years.

WH: When we started…old H. L. Wagoner come in here in the '30s and started raising grass in rows. That was all dry land. He was a grass grower from Wallowa Valley.

DO: When was this?

WH: The '30s.

DO: '30s.

WH: He did a lot of promotion. He was a good grass grower. He started his own variety of plant there in Imbler. He was really the granddad of the grass in rows and we cultivated it.

DO: What was his name again?

WH: H. L. Wagoner. His boy is still out there. In those days we didn't use a combine. We bound it and pulled in a stationary thresh machine and threshed it and then took it to the feed plant to be cleaned. It wasn't till the late '40s, early '50s that they decided we could modify a combine and cut it off what we call shock…or swath it and then put it up out of the windrow. Which was not an ivory ticket. It took a lot of crew to bind it and shock it and get it in the thresh machine.

DO: Was it a pretty big threshing machine?

WH: Yea, most of them were pretty good sized threshing machines. I don't know what the capacity would be. I'd help with old Shirley Blockin because I just farmed the couple hundred acres and I'd have time off in July. He'd run two binders. His son-in-law Bob Spencer and I would run one binder. When it come to threshing we pitched it into the thresh machine. The thresh machine was owned by Shirley and Renny Clark. Hire help here. The most I ever made was a dollar an hour. Old Shirley would pay six bits for the kids and old Fred and I a dollar an hour. We'd have to work about ten hours. Then you got rich. That was in the '40s.

DO: I just saw a load of strawberries go by.

WH: Yea, she's over there picking the kid's strawberries.

DO: Did you have sheep? Did you have cows?

WH: Here on the ranch we always had…we'd always sell cream to the creamery. Skim milk went to the hogs.

DO: Where was the creamery?

WH: In La Grande. Old Tyler at Blue Mountain and then Kay West had his own creamery for a while. Then there was quite a bit of cream that we shipped down into the valley somewhere. The old railroad…Ryan Heart from Imbler…they'd pick up cream on the express wagon and ship it to somewhere in the Willamette Valley. Out here on the ranch Ma had her chickens and we had a cow. At that time we were pretty good friends with Joe's Grocery up there. They'd call up and "We need for Friday and Saturday we need a few still hens and a few fryers." And we'd take a case of eggs in and take our cream to the creamery. Get a little cream check. Always had credit at the grocery store. In the fall Dad would go to town and sell enough grain and always bring back a barrel of flour, that's four sacks of flour. In the fall there come Walkins man and Rally man peddling vanilla and horse liniment and salve and spices. So you'd order up…it was going to be a hard winter so you stock up.

DO: Do you think winters have changed from forty to fifty years ago?

WH: No, we had mild winters and we had hard winters. From what my folks tell me, this road was just gravel down here to what we call Peach Lane. There was a bunch of mailboxes there. The old road __ on both sides. It wasn't graded up and it would get blew full of snow and stop traffic. Several winters in them days if you had a car you put it up on blocks in the wintertime because you didn't use it. Dad said one winter it kind of opened up, the ground froze, put air in the tires and let it off and drove to town all winter. Otherwise, we'd take the old buggy or sleigh. Especially to Island City, I had some grandparents live there. Then borrow their car and go into La Grande and finish our shopping. Make a whole day. Saturday was a big shopping day for farmers. Then you congregated around the __ dealer and the bank and see your neighbors.

DO: Get a haircut.

WH: Yea. Just like Island City, we had an old barber there for years. He had a bathhouse, the barber shop. My first haircut I can remember quite a few…two bits for a hair cut. Then finally it went thirty-five cents.

DO: Oooh.

WH: He'd stay open, especially in the harvest time, it would be ten, eleven, twelve o'clock before he'd close up. Guys come in… harvest crew… and they'd get a hair cut. The guys that runt he mill, the Kills old Fred and Burt, they'd stop there and get a shave in the morning. Ten cents for a shave. They said that old boy had the sharpest razor of anybody.

DO: Was that in the '30s and '40s?

WH: Yea.

DO: I think it's been a while since a guy went to the barbershop to get a shave.

WH: I don't think some of those barbers know what a straight razor is! I wouldn't trust them anyway! [laughter] I guess there's quite a difference. Some barbers they can really sharpen that razor up. Matter of fact, ___.

DO: That's alright.

WH: Over there in Europe after the war we ended up in Belgium. We'd go to town and the first women barbers had really been around. There was three or four ladies. This one gal put on a show. She'd give you a haircut and shave. She'd lather you

up and get up there and hold you and then WHAM like that then flip the old onto the floor. Boy if she ever missed she'd cut your shoulder! We used to like to go in there and get a shave just to watch her.

DO: Just to watch her. So you were gone there a couple years in the service?

WH: Yea, I went in '41 or '42, I guess. I got out of high school in '41 and went in '42. I was in till the end of the war and come home in '45, something like that.

DO: Did you see big changes prewar and after war in agriculture?

WH: Not really. Not in that time. We were still summer fallow, but we got better equipment. Our first…Dad sold the horse and went back to farm and our first tractor was called a Twin City. A wheel tractor. ___ I can remember it had two speeds, slow and slower. [laugh] Tractors were geared up how a horse would pull. Then in the '30s we had some…we called them the Dirty Thirties. They were dry years and that's when it really blew. I can remember coming out there on weekends and Dad would be plowing with that trying to plow six inches deep and probably four to five. I walked behind there and he was plowing up more dry dirt in the spray than he was wet dirt. That one year he took the ranch back we sold eighteen bushels to the acre of wheat. I don't know if we got it here in the old day book or not. The least he ever brought back…he'd go down to the mill and he'd sell a hundred bushels of wheat and the least he brought back was twenty-eight bucks. Twenty-eight cents a bushel he got. We'd see how long that would last and then he'd go sell another. Then it went up to thirty cents at that time. We didn't pay taxes in them days. We got bills, but nobody paid. Nobody had any money. Then we started making a little money. If we pay the current taxes they take up about a quarter. It was darn near later '30s darn near '40s before we got caught up on our back taxes. There in Island I know Dad was on the school board. The didn't have any money, they paid him in warrants, IOU. The mill company and boarding camps they'd pick up those warrants at a discount and wait for them. They'd get a little money in and they'd call up a certain number of due dates and cash them in. Made a pretty good interest.

DO: How old were you during the Depression?

WH: '28…the Depression didn't really start until about '30, was it?

DO: '29, '30. Seven or eight years old.

WH: You know there in Island there wasn't anybody on…we didn't have any relief or that. WPA didn't start until quite a bit later. When our old cow would go dry we'd trade milk to the neighbors. We all had a garden. Of the grandkids I was one of the younger ones so I got a lot of hand-me-down clothes. All except shoes. We'd go barefooted all summer. Anybody in town never went hungry. Everybody got along good and we survived. Everybody was in the same boat. Nobody had any more money than anybody else.

DO: Not to ever wish that again, but sometimes I wonder.

WH: I'm not too sure.

DO: Sometimes I wonder if we couldn't all scale down.

WH: In 1945, '46, our old combine…had interest in it with an uncle of mine…run it twenty-three years and decided Massy Harris shipped in a bunch of new self-propelled combines in. Thirty-six hundred dollars. I delivered some wheat at $2.36 a bushel to pay for that $3,600 combine. Today I can't hardly get two

dollars…the price is up a little yesterday, last week…but up until now I couldn't get $2.35 to pay for $150,000 combine. See your buying power you can see where…

DO: Its gone down.

WH: My dad and uncle always figured how many bushels of wheat does it take to buy a plow, a combine, a ranch, or this and that. You just don't figure that anymore.

DO: You'd be too shocked.

WH: Yea. Guys come from town and, "What does that new tractor cost?" There's $150,000. We're putting in…you ever been around a mint still?

DO: Yea.

WH: We just got one down … you should come down in August when its running.

DO: I can't take it, I can't take the smell. Its too much for me.

WH: That'll cure all your ills! It'll clean up your sinus.

DO: When Paul was harvesting his mint I thought, "Man, I can't take the smell anymore!"

WH: I love the smell of that. I smells a lot better at $15 a pound than it does $12 a pound.

DO: I'm sure! [laughter] I keep seeing the growth of mint around here and I keep wondering when the market is going to crash.

WH: Its already crashed.

DO: It has crashed.

WH: The whole deal is…you can come up with synthetic mint. Most of the mint is raised, roughly give or take, on the 45th Parallel across the States. As you go down to South America through Chile and that on the 45th. They're getting some mint oil out of there. I don't know. Just like Wal-Mart, Colgate we raise good quality mint oil. Mint oil is just like grain, you can raise poor quality or good quality. It depend on the area you are in. Our quality here is one of the better. Even better than Madras and the Willamette Valley and Idaho's mint is not near the quality we are. Wal-Mart and Payless they'll come in and "We'll give you so much for toothpaste. If you going to make it for that, fine, if not, we'll get somewhere else." We're getting controlled by the bigger outfits. Maybe they're good, maybe they're bad, I don't know.

DO: I just [tape glitch] Now those…

WH: An old book I found. It was from 1900. The old M&M company. You can see some of the nice handwriting.

DO: The old M&M company with what?

WH: Millie and Mercantile there in Island City. They also run a hardware store. They called it Milks. There in Imbler there's one building there. Its vacant now. Still Clyde L. Kittle. He was doing that and run the Island City store.

DO: We're looking at old ledger books from M&M business which was 1900. They've got dates stamped of 1900. Very nice handwriting.

WH: That's what I say. Look there, there's a date of sale sticking out.

DO: No. That's interesting. Are these the same?

WH: No, this is my Dad's old day book. He kept track of different things. This is about 1914/15 along in there. He had beautiful handwriting, too, as far as…

DO: Yea.

WH: I sure never inherited that. My mom you could hardly read her handwriting, but she could write and spoke beautiful German.
DO: August 23rd, five men shocking oats, $10. [laughter]
WH: Not quite a dollar.
DO: What's that…vitriol?
WH: Yea, the wheat…we used that for treating grain.
DO: I'll be darned. Paid Rosa cash $1. [laughter] That's pretty good.
WH: After we was in the feed…we owned a feed store up there in Island for years. During the Depression we decided we'd get a little more for our grain by sending it out for feed and seed. At that time, every little…Fruitdale, May Park and that…everybody had a few chickens and a cow. Worked the saw mill or the railroad. We run a little feed chopper there. That there in the '30s we got a dollar a ton chopping grain. We had a little gas motor on it and it cost about twenty-two cents to run that ton of grain. At the end of the day that was a little chopper and a dollar had come and it was more clear money than anything else. By the time the Second World War rolled around nobody fed chickens and cows. We finally had pickup there every third day we'd go to May Park and the next day to Fruitdale and then up to La Grande, old town, delivered chicken feed in the alleys. Both Safeway stores…Globe used to be a Safeway store and then they had one up there by the old La Grande Hotel. We'd take them in five or ten sacks a week maybe once or twice a month. They'd sell that out. People would come in to raise for chicken feed or…
DO: Are you talking about May Park? Was May Park ever like a park?
WH: No, I don't know why…
DO: Was this an area that they called May Park?
WH: Just the area.
DO: The doves are back. They'll be gone by hunting season, though.
WH: No, but they'll get pretty close to the house. I don't let them hunt around the buildings. What's hard now pheasants or finch rose…
DO: That's gone.
WH: The coyotes. We got more coyotes than we got pheasants.
DO: You know what moved in down there on Gekeler Lane is foxes.
WH: We got one fox back here. I seen a little kit the other day and it wasn't big as a cat.
DO: We had three litters of foxes over there so far. I mean you love them, they're beautiful, but you know they're going to get pesty.
WH: Yea.
DO: That was something new to me was seeing foxes move in.
WH: Yea, everybody's had some, but not till this year did I ever see on. Coyotes stay in the wintertime and there are just packs and then they get the dogs howling up a night. We'll start swathing and we do most of our swathing at night where its tough. They'll come out there and their follow up them wind rows within one or two wind rows getting mice.
DO: You know what I saw one time that I didn't know. I didn't know herons did this. I didn't know herons would go out in the field and hunt. Stand there by a gopher

hole and stand motionless…or for a mouse. All of a sudden that head darts down and gets. I thought they'd always feed in the water.

WH: Them badgers. Along the old state ditch and that and see them digging. Man, they get a hole once in a while! We get deer down here. Deer will come down here in the old sloughs and express road. They come right to the house and eat apples. They never stay in the wintertime. They'll come back here. They have little fawns and usually they'll have twins for some reason, I don't know why. I kind of like to watch the devils.

DO: I got a lot of those up on 12th Street. I live up there now and they're all over the place. Even some white tails up there.

WH: Flo Davison, you know her?

DO: Yea.

WH: She must feed…she'll call out and buy five or six sacks a grain a month and take up there to feed the quail and the deer.

DO: Oh yea. I should talk to Flo. I should see what Flo has to say. I know her from church. What do you think, Willy, are we winding down here?

WH: I don't know. I haven't found out anything, yet!

DO: You haven't found out anything? What do you mean? You're doing good.

WH: John Turner, he's working on…

DO: John Turner is. Pattie.

WH: He was working on a lot of photographs. I think Titan Fox there at the historical society he brought a lot of pictures from Imbler.

DO: Clayton he know a lot. He knows some about the apple industry.

WH: Yea. There's some pictures there. Imbler had a box factory there too at one time.

DO: You mean just for the apples?

WH: Yea. Then we had an old blacksmith move from Imbler to Island City and run a gun shop there. Old Jeff Barry. He's dead now. He even had to make a stock and shoe some oxen he was hauling from the sawmill at Summerville to lumber to the box factory there at Imbler and then some of it they exported too. He had to shoe oxen. He was one of the last guys that ever shod oxen, I guess.

DO: Oh boy, what a job.

WH: You didn't fool them. You made a stock and lifted them up belly. Once in a while we find this two old ox shoes around here. Two halves is what they come in. Clove hoof, you know. All our high ground…what we call our high ground the little knobs here…is where we can find Indian artifacts.

DO: I know. It must have been because they were not submerged when the water was here, I guess.

WH: They were on the high ground I can see. Especially pestles and that stuff…they never packed them back to Imnaha or Wallowa county when they left. They'd leave them and then the next year they'd come back. I'm just on a book now on __ the first Indians. Big thick…I'm just now where Chief Joseph gets run out of Wallowa County so I'm on the tail end of it. They talk about coming in the Grande Ronde Valley here in the summer especially around the Cove area digging camas root and running their horses. I can see a beautiful horse pasture. The chiefs they'd stay around La Grande on the Oregon Trail and they'd trade horses with the pioneers coming through. They pretty well shot…they were pretty

shrewd traders. They'd give them one good horse for two bad ones. Fatten them up all winter and next summer they come by they could trade them back again.

DO: That's Nez Perce Indians.

WH: Its cooler here. Just like now, most of…I call them snowbirds, they go to Arizona or New Mexico or California in the wintertime and then come back. Them Indians they were just smarter than we were!

DO: That's right. They knew it and knew what to do there. I'm about getting ready to be snowbird myself, I think.

WH: I never had the desire. I kind of like it when everybody is gone. It is surprising how many people love it. We were down last year at Laughlin, Nevada. We was there when the towers went down. Our old army had a reunion there then. Tours through there and retirement villages twice as big as La Grande! Its here, here and here! Beautiful, but…

DO: Not your cup of tea.

WH: Nah. We got stuck down there. Flew out of Boise to Vegas and then rented a car to Laughlin. We had guys there from New York and Florida…all over the United States. I don't know how some of them got home. We had another boy flew in the next day from Boise and he'd be down. Of course the planes were down. We called up the rental unit and we got to go back to Vegas and trade that car in for one that was licensed into Idaho. There was only three of us. It took two days to get to Boise. Had to trade cars in Vegas and talk about everybody trying to rent a car! It was really…had a little Indian boy from Lewiston. He finally got out of Vegas. Flew into San Francisco, flew into Portland, flew into Seattle and then he had to rent a car from Seattle to go back to Lewiston. He was four days getting home. This year in September we go to Pasadena, California to our army reunion there. The next year we're going to Lewiston to this Indian boy. He's going to take us up the Snake River.

DO: So you do it every year?

WH: We get together every year now. After fifty years. Out of our roster of two hundred and some odd there's only about half of them alive. Only about a third of them come. Some are real regular. We've met quite a few different places. Its more of a family than anything else. [end tape]

Willy Hamann

8/19/02, T1, S1

ES: This grass is grown several different places out in the valley.

WH: This is all our own, myself and Pete. That's we have here is our own grass. And this is all bluegrass, which is strain of Kentucky blue.

ES: And where is that grown?

WH: It's already right here on this valley around this ranch.

ES: In this immediate area.

WH: Yeah. Within two miles.

ES: And so raised this year.

WH: Yeah.

ES: When did you harvest it?

WH: We started a-swathin' at Fourth of July which is just normal. And then it lays about two weeks in the field and then we go into to combine. And we finished up… It's slow process, about two miles an hour.

ES: Why does it stay in the field for two weeks?

WH: It's got to go ahead and mature and dry, its green. And then it threshes out better. And you want it to get it while its tough yet then the heads don't shatter. Otherwise…we swath it just like hay, you know. And then you pick it up with the pick-up combine and bring it in here. Then this winter we'll start in about Thanksgiving time and…well, there's a other coarse grain slacks off and then we'll start cleaning it.

ES: Now is there a stage between the time you bring it to this area and the way it looks now? Do you get some of the straw out of it before you bring it in here?

WH: We knock it all…it's just…this looks like hay when it goes through the combine and that's a finished. And then it'll clean out about, oh, eighteen to twenty-five percent.

ES: So is the way it looks when it goes through the combine?

WH: Yeah. Yeah, that's right from the combine.

ES: And that shoots it up into a truck?

WH: Yeah. And then we just dump it.

ES: Like one of those?

WH: Yeah. We use one that we got settin' over here. Looks like one of those.

ES: How do you get it out of the truck into these piles?

WH: We just dump it.

ES: Okay.

WH: This raises up and then we just take a loader and push it up.

ES: Uh-huh. So how many tons of grass do you think you have here?

WH: Oh, there's three hundred thousand pounds.

ES: Is that about average?

WH: A little bit above average. We're a little heavier on acreage, too, this year. We have had…

ES: Was the yield better this year?

WH: On grass so far it's been…that's the only thing that was good. Wheat was just moderate. And it…it's just too early to tell. It's just going to be mediocre. And the wheat they quality is good, but the yields are down. Especially dry weather. We call our dry corners off our circles…definitely down. Just ran out of moisture.

JT: And the circles through the irrigation systems.

WH: Yeah.

ES: Were you irrigated more this year than you had been?

WH: No. No, we're limited. We got about…we still maintain some what we call dry land or summer fallow. Crooked fields that we can't get wheel lines in or that. 'Cause we've got…oh, let's see…at least three wells and then we pump a little off the river. It just…well, let's see…we got four or five…five circles, six circles I guess. And about a dozen, dozen and a half wheel…we call wheel lines, your quarter mile wheel lines. And that covers, oh, two-thirds of the ground we got.

ES: How long is it gonna sit here?

WH: This will stay here…matter of fact we just moved out the last clean seed here just before harvest. It was slow moving this year. It's all contracted for. We got ahead and clean it and bag it and gotta run a test on it, ___ and germination. Then as they needed it…this go down into the Willamette Valley. Used to be Northrop King and they've been bought out by another firm. They repackage the stuff there for Payless Drug and Wal-Mart and anybody else that wants. And then the top quality of our grass is what we call sod quality. That'll be ninety-eight pure and ninety or germination or better with no weed or no crop. And the people that raise sod they buy that and they pay a little premium for that. And they're the big uses of the grass seed, really, 'cause they keep fifteen, twenty pounds to the acre where we seed…when we reseed…seed a field five or six pounds, you know.

ES: Now none of this seed is of that quality?

WH: Oh yeah. We'll try and make of that what we call sod quality and the other…

ES: How do you sort it out so you get the best quality in a certain place?

WH: We start…they furnish us seed stock. And we go ahead and field rouge it and then…

ES: You do what?

WH: Field rouge. Come through if there's odd stuff in there we'll pull that out.

ES: I didn't get that word, rouge?

WH: Yeah. That means pullin'…we'll rouge wheat, we'll rouge grass, any odd varieties or that.

ES: Road or rouge?

WH: Rouge.

ES: R-o-u-g-e?

WH: Yeah.

ES: I've never heard that word used that way.

WH: ___

ES: What does it mean? You mean dig the grass?

WH: No. You just strip the head off or cut it off.

ES: Okay.

WH: And then the state'll come in on certification and they'll look at the seeding stock. Then they'll look at it as it's headed out. And then they…and then after we get it sacked off their send a person in here and then they'll sample it and send it to the Oregon State lab for what we call certification.

ES: How can you look at seed and decide that it's top quality?

WH: Usually when you get through…necessarily not too hard. You really depend on your germination and purity test. Old Mother Nature's got a lot to do with that. [walking] Sample here. This is called a probe. That's what we sample each sack with. Run it into that and pull it out and take a…

ES: You're spreading this seed from the probe on top of the glass with a light underneath it. You're applying a magnifying glass.

WH: Mm-hmm. Now you can look down there and…

ES: Yes. I see each individual kernel.

WH: You're looking for…now maybe this. We'll see what that is. [glass plates switching] Oh, that's a small…there's a piece of dirt.

ES: Yep.
WH: Which really don't count against you.
ES: Okay.
WH: You pick them… ___ or not. Now see it…when it come back from the seed lab they'll come in and the variety's Kentucky Blue, Kelly. And each…number Z is Union County and we're number eleven warehouse and lot number four and five. And that was 28, 000 pounds off of field number, which they keep, and the purity was 98.86 on that one and this had none found, soil, empty weeds and chaff. Then there's a little __ in that.
ES: Now this 98…what is it 98.66%...
WH: Yeah. Percent pure.
ES: Now that means free of other…the other weeds?
WH: Yeah. Inert matter was 1.18, see.
ES: I've seen those figures on the sides of sacks of grass.
WH: Yeah.
ES: But how can you tell when it's really premium quality?
WH: You're germination tells you, really, what…
ES: You have to actually germinate?
WH: Yeah. They'll take it. They gotta give it twenty-eight…grass is slow germing. They get twenty-eight days in an incubator, we call it an incubator. But it will germinate less than that but they give it twenty-eight days. Now wheat and barely seven, eight days on it is all you have to have.
ES: So if it germinates in less time does that mean it's higher quality?
WH: No, not really. The main thing is…
ES: I'm still trying to find out how you look at seed and find out whether it's really top quality?
WH: This all figures together, your…predominately your germination and purity from the college. And if it passes what we call certification then this blue tag is your top end. You really don't know until you get your report back. You can clean out too heavy. I catch the devils ___ set the machine up because I clean a little heavy. And I maybe run a little good seed over when you could put in two percent of light chaff or something that maybe it won't. It's a fine… And then if it don't take it then you got to reclean it and that costs you money so you don't want to reclean.
ES: Now when you say you run it a little heavy what does that mean exactly?
WH: I'm takin' out a little more than maybe I should?
ES: A little more of what?
WH: Small seed and light seed.
ES: You're getting a better product that way.
WH: Yeah. Then they turn around and we have what we call…if some of this seed doesn't have a hull on it or its just a hull, no germ in it, we call if fluff, they'll turn around they'll by that four a couple cents a pound. And that's when you go to Payless Drug you'll get 78% germ, they'll go ahead they'll buy that, and mix it one or two percent for a cheaper. So read the analysis on your…everything's gotta be analyzed.
ES: It doesn't say fluff on the side of the sack, does it?

WH: Yeah.
ES: You call if fluff.
WH: Yeah.
ES: What do they call it? Inert matter?
WH: Yeah.
ES: [laugh] Okay.
WH: Yeah, there's all kind of games to play in this.
ES: Yes, I'm sure.
WH: If we don't make grade, why, they dock us, see, don't use us as much. And if we're over, why, we don't get nothin' special. Then you turn around and by this, we call it junk, for nothin' to blend in, we call it blend, and then they put it…of course on the bluegrass they put a lot of your cheaper…rye grass is a real quick growing grass and it's a little courser and real cheap and they put a lot of rye grass in. And maybe four or five percent bluegrass for a permanent. And then you can get some with clovers in and…now notice my lawn we've never seeded clover and we've got more white clover than…which is alright because it…clover's a nitrogen builder. Where is comes from I don't know. So over thirty years…do you get clover in your lawn, John, or not?
JT: Yes, I do.
WH: It's never in the seed.
JT: No.
WH: But it just comes in somewhere.
ES: Now at what point in the process each year are these test being made to determine quality?
WH: They'll do seeding. They'll come and check our new seeding in the fall. And then in the spring after it's headed out they'll come in and check the field. Then when we get through cleanin' we call 'em up and they come in and sample the stuff. They don't even let us __.
ES: That's good. Keeps you honest.
WH: Now there's some of your different seeds that… The college made that up.
ES: I'm looking at a little plastic coin holder kind of an arrangement with all different kinds of seeds. These are not labeled. Do you know what each of them is?
WH: You've got…they're all numbered here.
ES: Oh, I see.
WH: Here's our __ and were always curly doc, wild mustard…
ES: Do you keep this in order to be able to see what kinds of seeds you've gotten into your mix?
WH: If we find one then I got this to compare it to. I can "hey, that's…that little black seed that's number eleven. Eleven is barnyard grass."
ES: And you're not happy when you see those.
WH: No, no. So then we do a little fine adjustin' try to get rid of that.
ES: Yes. Can we see the cleaning operation?
WH: Mm-hmm.
ES: Where's that? Where does that go on?
WH: Pardon?
ES: Where does that go on?

WH: The cleaning?
ES: Yeah.
WH: In those machines. Each machine does a little different cleaning.
ES: I'm not expecting you to turn it on, just tell me how it works.
[tape interruption]
WH: …in here and we dump in that box. And there it goes over…we call this a receiving separator. It takes out just the light…the coarser stuff.
ES: Is it a series of metal screens, is it?
WH: Yeah. Well here, we've got 'em all out. Graduated by sizes by sixty-fourths.
ES: Mm-hmm. And these have to be pretty well cleaned or sterilized, don't they, to keep…?
WH: Not so much sterilized as we pull 'em out and clean out any other odd weed seed. Then it goes back up and into what we call a debearder. We get some of them tied into doubles, we call it, two of 'em. And that splits the doubles and then goes back into our…another clipper, which is four screen machine. Takes out the course and then the bottom screen takes out the fine. Then it goes back up into a…you see it up there…we call it a carter disk and it'll take out cheat grass out of bluegrass. Anything that's longer. Take out wild oats. It's…then it comes back into these coffers here which is just indents. One indent it'll reject the seed and pull out big stuff. And this other it'll pull out like your claush and you're real fine stuff. And then our finish machine is what we is what we call our gravity deck. In matter of fact, we get a separation here. We get our…there' air comin' up underneath and this vibrates. I'll turn it on in a minute. And the deck is full and the heavy seed works uphill and the __ this way and the wind blowin' this way so the lights come down here. And if we get any rocks, like that black clod, it'll work up along…along that. And we run these adjusting gates. If you stand back I'll just turn it on.
[tape interruption] [sound of machine working]
WH: __ the deck fills this way. Add more wind. Add more shake. It…__ once in a while to set it up.
ES: So is it final product coming out here?
WH: Yeah. Yeah usually I just…in here. Then it goes into our sack outfit. Then I put it in fifty-pound sacks.
[tape interruption]
WH: …they called 'em. And the same thing you…you can run in gold over there and gold is heavier than it'd go up to top.
ES: So are machines like this used for many other kinds of crops besides grass seed?
WH: Yeah. These are variable machines. In matter of fact up there for wheat and barely is the same as one of these. And we can…oh, we've cleaned lettuce, spinach. You just use different size screens. We maintain a __ bunch of screens, lots of fans like a dry yield. Now I might have to go down maybe 1/64th this year on account of bein' dry. But then you get into real fine. This is your bottom screen and this is coarse screen. So you keep 'em…a variety of screens. And you start in and maybe the seed is a little plumper so you have to go up one because you're runnin' too much good seed over the top. Once you get goin', why… But

it'll take maybe a day or two to get everything adjusted up and runnin' right and to suit ya.

ES: For what period are you typically running the machines then?

WH: From Thanksgiving to after the first of the year. It's a slow process. We only run, oh, three or four ton of clean seed a day here. 'Cause cut down the…we don't…the gal she worked eight hours. She only works six days a week in the wintertime. But I'll come over in the morning and maybe start it up and maybe make an adjustment too. And I check…good enough now. She's been here I don't have to check during the day at all unless she has some breakdown or somethin' and then she'll come and get me. Lots of time if we're in a hurry for a lot I'll come over here and run another two or three hours of the night. Then we had…well, a little more…we might have to this year. We have run two eight hour shifts.

ES: Do you remember when you installed this machinery?

WH: Yeah. Just fairly recently. The warehouse had to be in 1976.

ES: '76?

WH: '76. It had to be approved by the state. They had to come in and check it all out. A matter of fact, my neighbor and I put it together. It took us two years to get everything…the buildings up and stuff installed.

ES: What led you to do this?

WH: Pardon?

ES: What led you to do this?

WH: Just like to be your own boss. I mean…main thing it cost quite a lot…now they got this up to…I don't know…they tell me everyday how much a pound to run like Blue Mountain or Barrenburg, your costs, see to…by the pound. And there's commercial…there' always somebody that gets their grass run first and always somebody last, you know. On a commercial __ you can't help it. It wasn't…at that time it wasn't…they tried to ram too much through. Didn't have storage enough. So we decided we were gonna raise grass we were gonna do our own cleaning. Then if we have a problem lot we can slow down a little bit. And like I say, if you're runnin' it commercial and hired help you've got to run so many pounds through there and that's when you're gonna run maybe a little good grass over for the guy. Or you're not gonna quite do it again then you got to reclean the thing and that costs you money, so we decided we've better control for our own. We got some of it…we call 'em granddaddy contracts. With the wholesaler. Now most people have to get the contracts through either Blue Mountain or Barrenburg. 'Cause any time, why, you get something, why, somebody gets the penny rolled off. And it pays for itself in time. I think three years we paid for… At that time we put this in it wasn't all that expensive. I hate to put one in now.

ES: Where do you get this machinery? Or where did you get it then?

WH: Our salesman…in fact, old George Royce pretty well engineered everything for us.

ES: George Royce?

WH: Yeah. He was granddaddy there at the Blue Mountain. But the standard clippers are standard and all that. It's just the idea of puttin' 'em in and doin' it.

ES: Have you been doing it, I mean cleaning grass seed, for other grass growers around here besides you?

WH: Years ago before we were really in the grass we cleaned a lot of small stuff, sweet clover, alfalfa and that. And then we got off into…well, we lost our…when we went into green peas we lost our pollinatin' bees for alfalfa and clover. Then we got into…we cleaned some grass at first during what we called the triple A days. Old crusted wheat and some of that kind of stuff. So we've cleaned grass, I think, for fifty years starting with alfalfa and clovers and things like that. I don't know, I....

JT: Show up there __ two of the old __.

WH: We raised our grain and we raised grass and a few cows and ___. After that meeting we set around there kind of talking __ "Hey," he says, "I thought that grass was illegal." [laughs] I said, "Well, no, you gotta specify. This is lawn grass, you know, golf course." "Oh!" So you see, so now I got a say when we raise grass not particular grass, long grass.

ES: They jumped to the wrong conclusion.

WH: But I thought…you know, it never dawned on me like that. But grass…I was…he said, "I thought grass was illegal." Years ago I'd see an article in the…one of the farm magazines in Montana there's some guy…dairy…and he was green choppin' marijuana for his cows. __ but he said, "I had the most contented cows in the country."

ES: Very happy cows. [laughs]

WH: It is. It's a high protein, you know, for green choppers it's like hay. They put a kibosh to that. Now my neighbor Bob come from Nebraska grows wild there along the swales and that. And about time it's ready to harvest the state puts up signs that "Do Not Harv…" That people can almost kind of tell when it's ready to harvest when they put up the sign. [laugh]

JT: Willy, I've heard that some of this birds' feed that they're growin' in the South that there may be marijuana seeds in that. Is that…have you ever heard that?

WH: Yes. But the best __ old Dale Council. His brother was up there in Columbia Basin and he stopped at a nursery and he picked up some lettuce plants a few other things like that, put it in his truck and, boy, there's one odd plant there that, by heck, it turned out to be a marijuana! The seed got mixed up with… Years ago we had…we was raisin' some spinach seed here and I run…or lettuce seed__ it runs from lettuce seed to the plant. And cleaned that and I really cleaned up after but once in a while one will stick behind another __ like that. And it came out…it's pretty close to bluegrass size, you know, lettuce. It was a little flatter. But anyway I picked it up in what we call a second salvage plot and I sold that into Baker at the farm cereals that Chandler was… And they was sellin' it out to… One of his town gals come up…called up, "Hey, Rod, come down here. I got some strange weed comin' up every once in a while in my lawn." Old Rod went over "Oh, we gotta charge you more. That's bonus crop. __." [laughs] Of course it'd kill right off 'cause there's no. But, yeah, it showed up and she had a… It looks different, you know, lettuce.

ES: Yes.

WH: That's why we just stay with one bluegrass and we don't have contaminating. It's hard to clean up between lots. That's the way down there at Imbler. Now they've got one line there that __ out at Imbler. And the bluegrass plant's all the way at Alicel.

JT: H. L. Wagoner was the first person in the valley to really start growing grass.

WH: Yeah. He come in here __ probably. __ during the Depression. Of course you raised it in rows then. Didn't' irrigate it. Cultivated it, bound it and threshed it. And it was there in…after Second World War before we started combining.

JT: George Royce, whom you mentioned over there, was another farmer in the valley __ Summerville.

WH: ___ but he was and old H. L. He was the nicest thing, guy. He got us…we lived there at Island. I was just a little punk kid in high school then, see. And he talked us into…'cause he wanted to go more in grass. He was cleaning alfalfa. So really talked us into this what we called __. It really finished us up. So Dad finally bought one and set it up there.

JT: And that's in your plant that's in Island City?

WH: Yeah.

JT: And your Dad…

WH: I couldn't get that thing to work. H. L. he was livin' in town then and he stopped by. __, well, he always called me Kid. "Oh, Kid, come over here." I get that thing out of work and we got it going. Now he said, "You make one adjustment at a time, only one, and see what it does. And then you correct from that." And about a half hour he had that deck covered and everything was working perfect. He really…what little I know, why, he got me started. He was just a nice…he'd share a lot of information with anybody. He was promotin' grass.

JT: Your dad the fact that he had the…a plant there in Island City was he kind of forerunner of cleaning products like you do?

WH: We started as feed mill. That during the Depression in the '30s. We call 'em the dirty dry '30s. That was when…I got an old ledger here and Dad had sold the ranch and he had to take it back in '31 or __. I don't know which. But anyway, we didn't have anything. Took the __ off the mill. The least he ever brought back was twenty-eight dollars. He'd go sell a hundred bushels for twenty-eight cents a bushel. We'd see how long that would last. Then he'd go sell another hundred bushels maybe __ twenty-nine or thirty. So they decided gosh…you know, a lot of people had chickens in them days and made part…they all had cows and a pig or two. So we started an old warehouse there and started selling the feed grain. ____ all the time. But an old gas car loader on it and cost about twenty cents for chop a ton of grain for a dollar. That little old chopper made us more hard money at a dollar a ton than anything else. In a day we'd have…they'd come in five sacks in the pick-up or two sacks in the back of the car and run through the chopper and take it back home ground for the hogs to eat, you know. And that made us more clear money than anything else, really.

JT: That's a neat deal.

WH: Then got into cleaning a little seed. And one thing as we cleaned even, years ago, for old Bill Prite here. A real old Doc Lumsee. He sewed sacks out here for old Bill Fry of mustard seed.

JT: And he became a physician.
WH: Yeah. Old Doc Ingall he finished bundles out here for these farmers.
JT: Is that right?
WH: Yeah. See, that was around 1900.
JT: He was an osteopath.
WH: He's also an M.D., too, you know.
JT: Yeah. Is Dr. Margaret his wife?
WH: Yeah.
JT: Dr. Ingalls.
WH: She was the nicest gal. And then of course…like old Judge Green and Doc Ingall and several. And the farmers were gettin' out of debt they's up there buyin' ground. I remember when the Pierce place came up here for sale. It was listed at seventy-five bucks an acre. That was about top…well, top ground, but top price. I know several of the prominent farmers ___ top ones. And Jack Brush and things in there at the warehouse settin' behind the stove talkin', "Well, you know, ain't a bad price. Now if I was just out of debt…" Woodrow Harrison another one of 'em. "Just out of debt woudn't want to take it on. But I'm going to get out of debt first and then." By the time they got out of debt, why, the good buys were…
JT: Prices went up.
WH: The doctors and lawyers got paid first, you know, and they…especially the doctors.
JT: Grover McGrim really didn't do too bad.
WH: No. Grover was a shrewd. Of course his wife was a Connley.
JT: Yeah. His farm, Eugene, was out on Mt. Glenn just this side of the school there. It's a brick house that sits on the right as you start down the hill.
ES: Now I see clouds of smoke coming up over here. What can you tell me about that?
WH: That's a grass field bein' burned. That's like this grass field out here. And see the idea you gotta shock that grass. It's gotta go dormant. And we'll burn it and we'll kill a lot of insects and diseases and then we'll poor the water to it and the fertilizer. And the new shoots this fall are our seed head for following year. We're waitin' for the south wind here to burn this. This here won't… Now that probably hasn't been baled off. There's enough smoke there that… But where we baled it off we've gotta go in and propane burn it there and singe it. We get a little smoke, but not near… But the main thing is we gotta keep it on the ground.
ES: Why do some people bale it off and other people don't?
WH: It's just a cost factor…[end tape]

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WH: …we gotta call up Imbler. They run a smoke… They take samples of... Somebody flies every day and take…at different areas take different temperatures. __ Pendleton and then they come back and wind and, well, good smoke dispersal or not.
ES: And that looked like a pretty small area today.

WH: Yeah. Oh, that's probably…that's probably an eighty acre.
ES: Eighty?
WH: Mm-hmm.
ES: Really.
WH: But it could…__ you get a good…before you bale you around the field and get it goin' and that makes you throwin' and just go up and it looked like an atomic bomb if the condition just right.
JT: Now this propane burn that you're using there is that one that Jack Jensen perfected down there for the State of Oregon?
WH: I don't know. This is made my Rears. Probably awful close to bein' what…
JT: He worked on that project down for the State of Oregon for several years.
ES: That's to reduce the smoke?
WH: Yeah. Very definitely. I mean, but still here where we're next to the highway we like to get a south breeze.
ES: How do you operate propane burners? Do you go around by hand or is it on a truck?
WH: No, we pull it by tractor. It's about a forty foot width.
ES: Is it just like sort of singing the grass?
WH: Yeah. Well, them hoods pull down, see. And the burners are underneath here and that gets tremendous heat there.
ES: Would there be maybe half as much smoke as we see out there now or less than that?
WH: Probably less than that. Once in a while if it's just right and you got enough breeze you can go…the field and don't have to propane at all. It'll work together. But you got have enough breeze. If it's too quiet then you gotta propane everything. Out here in the field you can see we run some test strips. We got some burnt, some not burnt and some burnt heavy, you'll notice. We hired an agronomist. Then we harvest them separate so we can tell. We get more yield off of a medium burn that we do a no burn, but we need three or four years of data because it's just our second year on that.
ES: How do you tell the difference between a medium and a heavy burn?
WH: You pretty well tell some of this how hot it is. It just kind of singes it on a light burn.
ES: Now that's a propane.
WH: Yeah.
ES: And you turn up the gas…
WH: You just go slower.
ES: …turn up the gas to get a hotter flame for a heavy burn?
WH: You just go a little slower.
ES: I see. Yeah.
WH: You can stop on the way out __up there in the grass. You'll miss his plots. Quebbeman he runs a…well, he monitors our…we hire him by the acre. He monitors all our mint for mite, cutworms, any diseases and the same way in our grass. And then he go ahead and soil samples for us and then we fertilizer according to soil sample whatever we need, nitrogen or phosphate or a combination. About our three or four years we use a little zinc.

ES: When do you put the fertilizer on?

WH: We'll probably… On grass you can either do it all the fall or I put half on in the fall and half on in the spring. And the mint we'll put one on the fall and we'll put about two more on. It loves…mint loves water and it loves fertilizer and it loves Mexicans.

ES: Tell me again about the Mexicans who come and do the hoeing for you. What exactly do they do and how long does it take them?

WH: They just work by the hour and it depends on the amount of weeds. And they've been here long enough now we just get in the pick up and start the __ field and get that done they just come to the next one and next one.

ES: This a plain old long-handled hoe?

WH: Long-handled hoe. And they'll wear out a hoe in a year, believe it or not.

ES: And why do you have to get the weeds out that way?

WH: Because some of chemicals don't take care of everything.

ES: And any kind of machine weeder would break the plants?

WH: Yeah. You've either got to use chemicals or hand hoe. Some of our weeds, our broadleaves, we can take out with chemical, but there's certain weeds that they just affect and it kills the grass. So then you…especially around the outside. Cheat grass is probably the worst of any of it. __ walk down along the edges of this field. Once you get it clean then next year you can go through pretty fast.

ES: Does your mint crop just one weeding session?

WH: Oh, we're spraying that thing two or three times. We're starting with simbar and then we'll go into a broadleaf and then probably two and maybe three shots of fertilizer here in the growing season.

ES: And all of that doesn't get all the weeds so the Mexicans have to get the rest, is that it?

WH: Yeah.

JT: To handle these chemicals and things you have to be certified now, don't you?

WH: Oh, more red tape through that! Pete spends half his time there keepin' records! You've gotta…for the state, I mean, you got what you're using, temperature, wind velocity, oh don't ask me all! I'm glad I quit farmin'. But yeah, spends half his time bookkeepin'. And then it don' amount to a hill of beans because as yet you've gotta have on record, but you don't have to turn it in or anything yet, but you're gonna have to. Some of your restricted pesticides are worse. Some of our common yet is not too bad.

ES: Is there any runoff into the ditch here?

WH: No. That's a waste of money, boy.

ES: I mean runoff that like had resulted from the irrigation that you didn't plan on.

WH: No. Predominately because we're supposed…the ditch…the river there we run don't get no runoff from that. The same way with water. Now with the sprinklers, boy, you just don't have the tail water like you do on row crop or somethin' like that.

JT: The only time that you ever had problems was was when things flooded.

WH: Yeah.

JT: That would be the only possible contamination.

WH: Right now the…my neighbors up here, the Rushmans, they were pumping out of the river one pump there and they come and cut it off the other day. Gotta have water for the suckers, I guess. But they cut everybody off and still not any water. You seen what was up the river.

JT: Right.

WH: I think we've got more water in the river down here than there was up there. Because see, they're still dumping a bunch of La Grande sewage in that thing.

ES: Treated sewage.

WH: Yeah, yeah. Fit to drink. But it's funny, you know, we can lay out a hand pack and irrigate on Monday mornin' and then don't use it again 'til the next Monday mornin'. You go to move that thing and it just smells like a __ toilet for some reason. But it's fit to drink! [laughs]

ES: So they say, huh?

WH: I think we picked up a little fertilizer with it. And it has…it used to be that old river there when it got low that old carp. You've seen them haven't you?

JT: Yes.

WH: You know that phosphate from that has cleaned them carp out. There's hardly any carp left. Of course what it done…wasn't any salmon anyway so it don't make any difference at that time of the year, but… But it did clean up the carp.

ES: Yeah.

JT: I keep tellin' Bethel in the old days that the city dump was along the Grande Ronde River.

WH: Yeah, down there about where the Pioneer Park is at. Along in there.

JT: Valley Sausage and the packing plant, Elridge Packing Plant. And they wanted to know a while back here about a landfill down there. I told 'em about high water and it'd wash down the river. And that's the way that a lot of the garbage…

WH: What was it that one that had the real high water there and it dumped a whole bushel of carbide trying to hold the bank and they'd wash out. A matter of fact I got a top of that…who was it house that's washed out? Had the whole top out…

JT: ___ Lovely's house.

WH: Yeah. Had the whole top off.

JT: That was in '65…

WH: Of course farmed around that.

JT: …when we had our flood.

WH: Summer I was dry and I "well, I'll burn that." And there was about three coats of shingles and then asphalt and then more shingles. And when I got through all I had was a big pile of nails. [laughs] More clean up than…

ES: Let's go back to the mint operation if we could. Would you describe the process of cutting the mint out there in the fields?

WH: We had a lot about like alfalfa hay, you gonna use a swather. And…swather. Put it in windrows like you see there. And leave it should be about two, maybe three, days to cure it and drop the moisture. And then we go in…well, you see the field chopper out there. And we chop it in right 'til it's set.

ES: You're totes are what?

WH: The wagons. We call 'em totes.

ES: Yellow…

WH: Yeah.
ES: Trucks, yeah. You call 'em wagons?
WH: We call 'em totes.
ES: Or they're wagons.
WH: Yeah.
ES: Okay.
WH: See, he…in matter of fact that's a little bit green yet. We swathed that…well, the last of it was Sunday morning and see today's Monday morning. It's probably…we figure on saying we'll start tomorrow morning on it. So it'll probably be dry enough. If it's too green it takes too long to run it through the still. It'd take three hours. But it take three hours of fuel then so we try to get a happy medium in there.
ES: Now when you put it in the totes you try to pack it as tightly as possible?
WH: No. It just blows in.
ES: Just blows in?
WH: Mm-hmm.
ES: Uh-huh.
WH: It's pretty well packed. And time the wagon bounces too, you know.
ES: And then when you start the steam operations?
WH: Just as soon as we get the wagon full we'll start. And we try to start one ever fifteen or twenty minutes and then we can get it in a rotation. Because it takes two hours, see, and then we can take one off every half hour or so.
ES: Tell me again. The steam is coming from pipes in the floor of the tote. There are little holes in these pipes, right?
WH: Correct.
ES: And the steam comes percolating up through…
WH: Up the mint.
ES: …the mint and goes out the screens at the top of the tote.
WH: Mm-hmm.
ES: Is that right?
WH: That's right.
ES: Okay. And then what exactly is happening to the mint in that process?
WH: It's mixed up with water. The steam it's hot. And that's where we got those condensers and that's full of cold water and a bunch of pipes. And that cools it down and condenses the steam off and it's liquid. There's still water with it. Then it comes down into what we call them receiving cans. And just like cream separator. The oil is lighter than water so oil comes to the top and the water goes out the bottom. So it takes a little variation there 'til we get enough oil. Every time we run a tote, why, we drain that off. And roughly, why, it's just roughly a hundred to a hundred and twenty pounds of oil per wagon or tote.
ES: Now when the steam's going through it's temperature is quite high. What's the temperature in those separators? Or what do you want it to be?
WH: We keep that down to about a hundred and twenty. On the cool side.
ES: Why does it have to be that hot?

WH: It just separates a little better when it's…just like oil. In the cold morning it's pretty think and heavy and in the afternoon it thins down. So you keep it pretty liquid.

ES: Okay. Is the water evaporating entirely? Or do you drain it off somewhere?

WH: No, we have to drain the water off. __ use for irrigation or… In matter of fact the distilled water that comes off of… So if you want distilled water, why, bring your jug down. [laughs] We used to use that in batteries and now, why, I don't know what distilled water is.

ES: Wouldn't this be distilled water with a hint of mint?

WH: Yeah. [laughs] With a hint of mint.

ES: That might be a good drink. You could bottle that as a side business here.

WH: No, you've gotta have some bourbon to go with your mint fuel.

ES: Alright, advertise it that way. And then when the mint rise…mint oil rises to the surface in that little container we say…what, was about a foot across?

WH: Yeah.

ES: Then it…you siph…you...you drain that off into those large containers that…like the ones we've seen across…?

WH: Yeah. Containers or barrels.

ES: Are those…those are metal or stainless…?

WH: They're plastic.

ES: Plastic?

WH: Yeah.

ES: Uh-huh.

WH: But see, they're covered with metal to protect them from…

ES: Yeah.

WH: And this other outfits they're all stainless…or galvanized barrels.

ES: Mm-hmm. So you don't have to do anything else to the mint after it comes out of that separator…cream separator arrangement except put it in these plastic barrels or tubs, right?

WH: Yeah. Then this goes to Sunnyside, Washington receiving station. And there…there's still a little moisture with it. They'll put a vacuum on that and draw off a little moisture. And then it's also…they run certain tests on that. And our quality of oil here is probably as good as anything in Oregon. Matter of fact, it's quite a bit better than Idaho oil. It's on a fram basis and don't ask me anything about that because I haven't kept up with it. But they do like our oil and that gives it a little better chance at marketing 'cause some outfits they want to blend better oil with poorer oil.

ES: Do you have any idea what makes the oil better?

WH: No. It's just the climate's got a lot to do with it.

ES: Mm-hmm.

WH: Idaho is quite a bit…they get a few more pounds of oil than we do 'cause they got warmer nights. But somewhere along the line, why…Madras is a real high quality oil and we're pretty close to Madras. But they got disease in there and wilt and that and they're just about out of the mint business in Madras. And the Valley is way down. Willamette Valley is way down on mint oil, too.

ES: Does that make the Grande Ronde Valley one of the major oil producers in Oregon, then?

WH: I wouldn't say major, but we're fairly up there. Hermiston Boardman area produces quite a bit of mint. And there's some…quite a bit in Washington, too. More or less mint is grown on the forty-fifth parallel wherever it runs through the whole states. And then the other side of the equator, Chile and that, on the forty-fifth one down there. Promotin' it now. And I see China. They harvest it with a hand cycle and tramp it in the tubs and got a little old hand __ stoker there. So, I mean we're competin' against a…

ES: Worldwide.

WH: Now they come out with this synthetic mint, they tell me, that… I don't know what they make it out of. Still our major buyers are Palmolive, Colgate and those people that use it in flavoring.

ES: Does most of it go into toothpaste?

WH: Toothpaste a lot of it. In matter of fact, when we started on top they'd fly in Colgate and Palmolive representatives in to the valley and show us our stills. Real interesting people. And they want the quality and I shouldn't run Payless Drug down, but Payless is goin' out. We can use so much for toothpaste that you can't get better toothpaste for that, why, somebody else will, so, I mean…

ES: Does some of it go to candy manufacturing?

WH: Oh yeah. Confectionary takes a lot of oil, too. Candies and…

ES: Gum.

JT: How 'bout mouthwash?

WH: Yeah. Anything that's got mint flavor. You just take that bottle John got and dip your toothpick in. If you put it in your tea, why, just put one drop in. Don't put a tablespoon. [laughs]

JT: I believe that your wife gave some, too. She put a teaspoon for candy and nobody ___.

ES: It looks so innocent, doesn't it?

JT: It does.

WH: Now see that smoke is just pretty well down now.

ES: Yes. Do you foresee this operation going on pretty much the way it now for the next several years?

WH: I don't predict anything anymore.

ES: Alright.

WH: Things is changed so fast. Yes, it's gonna be…we're gonna be…I hope you guys are eatin'…roll…bread yet and usin' the mint flavored… matter of fact one of my army lieutenants here before he died we had a reunion. He was from Detroit. Real knowledgeable engineer, you know. Of course he didn't know anything about farming. "What do you raise?" "Well, some of it was mint." "What do you use that for?" I said, "Confectionaries, toothpaste and this and that." That fall I got the nicest Christmas card from him. He says, "I got…use the mint toothpaste and every time I brush me teeth," he says, "I think of you now."

ES: Good.

WH: And I thought that was… [laughs] Old Lieutenant Carl F. Gilts.

ES: John said earlier that you are rotating part of the mint crop each year.

WH: Yeah. We take out…we're on a rotation. Now five years and then we take a field out and we go back for another five or ten years. Then we'll go into a cereal crop like oats or wheat or barley and then probably alfalfa and then five or six years back into…

ES: I assume that's because the mint takes certain kinds of nutrients out of the soil.

WH: Disease wise.

ES: Oh, I see.

WH: Matter of fact, our mint ground we can cut back on some of our fertilizer the first or year or two on the cereal crops because carryover that we have to used.

ES: There goes a tote, right?

WH: Yeah.

ES: Do they put the chopped mint in the top?

WH: Yeah. See that door there through the top?

ES: Yeah.

WH: ___

ES: We're going over to look at a tote now.

WH: …the door closed it's chopped right into that… That door is open. Chopped right into that.

ES: Oh, I see. This is the blower device.

WH: Mm-hmm. [pause]

ES: Mm-hmm.

WH: [laugh] That's oil in the leaves.

ES: Mm-hmm.

WH: There's more in the leaves. This is a little…[tape interruption] It'll take him…oh, he'll fill one of them up to ten minutes. [tape interruption] One of 'em they take across the mountain and they chop corn silage for the dairies over there. Here's the big cutter thing. [tape interruption]…and a little dew keepin' this dry. You can hear the radio squawkin' there now. [radio voice]

JT: Years ago Willy was out farmin' his fields when he was out at Island City and some kids were stealing gas from his vehicle clear at the other end of the field. And the closer he got the more they__. And when they left they just left the hose just goin' out on the ground.

ES: Now tell me about the silage or the...what do you call it? The mint…

WH: Slugs?

ES: Slug. Sludge.

WH: We put them back… You see it'll pile up. And we'll spread them out and they'll go back into the ground. They're…see, you've killed all the weed seed in there so there's no danger of getting' any weed seed. And you've got twenty, thirty pounds of nitrogen plus a few other. And it's a good organic matter 'cause it chopped it deteriorates real fast. Of course first out we put on the poorest ground we got trying to improve our poor ground. And it's really done a higher pH ground and light ground. And now, well, we've got one row down here. And of course we'll spread that when we get through and work it back in the ground. And once in a while, oh, somebody from Cove they'll want a load for their garden and John wants a…who's your friend?

JT: Greg Turner who lived behind me.

WH: Yeah.
JT: So got some and put in our rose bushes.
WH: Did it do him any good?
JT: Yeah.
ES: I'd like…
JT: It's good mulch.
ES: I'd like to get some.
WH: Tell John.
JT: Okay. We'll…
WH: Boyd's up…has some by the…there that we give away. But if they want a full load, why, it'd cost 'em fifty bucks for a…
JT: It gets real warm.
WH: And then they…
JT: It gets real warm.
WH: Then some of these women, "My gosh! ___" they'll say. When you dump one of the pods in their driveway or somethin', see. But time you tie a truck driver up and that, you know, why.
ES: Sure.
JT: It smells good.
ES: You should charge for it.
WH: Mm-hmm.
JT: And it keeps down the weeds.
WH: Yeah. Well, there's one outfit and I…before we got…really got into mint we worked in the grass seed and was down the Willamette Valley. One guy had an old landing strip there and he dump in this mint silage out there and roll it over every day or two if ___. Then he come in and chopped it again and bagged it and he's sellin' it to the floral plants and the greenhouses. And a little market a lot with that. It holds water good and that's what they use for the bedding plants 'cause you… Just like old __. You go out here and you add a little steam boiler and he'd throw a tarp over it and steam the ground in order to…because kill the weeds. And it is. It's a good…but gosh, we'd of flood the market with… I mean. The same way you go to Wal-Mart and that and you'll see in the spring steer manure. Now how do they know they ain't a few heifers or a few cows in that along with that steer manure? [laughs] Manure's manure, I mean.
ES: True.
WH: But that's what I call a false advertisement. [laughs] The same way with feed lots. You know, some guy he's dryin' that and choppin' it. It is good and… But like I say, the cost of… ___?
JT: Yep.
ES: Tell me exactly how you determine when the mint is ready to harvest?
WH: We haven't really decided a hundred percent yet, but ten, fifteen percent what we call bloom. And then…
ES: I see what look like flowers on 'em.
WH: Yeah. That's what we call bloom. This would be my neighbor's. And they'll probably… Our outside is a little short on moisture, see, don't get quite as even a moisture. But he'll probably take this off next week.

ES: Are you gonna have…
WH: __ get in the rotations. Like I say, some of it's just right, some of it's too early.
ES: Are you gonna distill his mint?
WH: No. The neighbors. Vernal can distill his.
ES: Where's the next distillery?
WH: It's right up the road here. See, there's your bloom.
ES: Yeah.
WH: But…see, you get out here a little ways and he hasn't got only maybe four or five percent bloom. But see, you're a little short here on the end on water because you don't… In order to get the road __.
ES: What percentage of bloom do you look for before you harvest?
WH: Fifteen to twenty percent.
ES: Uh-huh.
WH: More or less. I mean you try to coordinate it and keep your still goin', keep enough down ahead.
ES: What would happen to the mint if you were late on harvesting it?
WH: Get too late then it gets too dry on ya and some of the oil'll go back down into the root system. You lose some oil.
ES: Mm-hmm.
WH: And we don't know…see, we had frost the day before yesterday. Whether that had…kind of wilted. Whether it gonna cut down our yield a little or not we don't know yet.
ES: Uh-huh.
WH: Usually we don't have frost here 'til the fifteenth September instead of fifteenth of August.
ES: Is this a hybrid variety of mint?
WH: No. It's bred up…uh, I forget what variety this is. There's only one or two varieties. But it's original root stock come from the college and then it's put out here and increased. And it's inspected for disease especially…oh, what do they…anyway. Then we seed it from that. Increase it yield wise. We'll buy it one acre of roots will approximately seed ten acres in a commercial field.
ES: Now I'm not sure I understand that. You dig up the plants once they've been cut?
WH: Yeah. We'll go in this fall we'll dig the root…we call the root.
ES: Yeah.
WH: And you can either seed it in the fall or the spring. But you can get a little more yield if you fall seed it.
ES: You talk about seeding it. Do you mean planting the roots?
WH: Yeah, plantin' the roots. I call it seedin', but… In matter of fact it's fairly shallow rooted. I wish had somethin' different here to dig with. There's what you're…see, these are…and then you just put them in ground however and then they'll spread out.
ES: What's the process for planting the roots?
WH: A good seed bed and then you want what we call really green roots. In matter of fact you dig in one day and seed in the next day while there's still moisture in the things. And then you want to keep enough moisture on them so they won't die or rot.

ES: And you do this with a machine, right?
WH: Yes.
ES: Exactly how does the machine put the roots in the right way?
WH: It's just like a manure spreader. It's got a belt on it and there's a digger here and it digs a furrow. And then it feeds the roots in the chute and then the back covers 'em up. Then usually, why, we'll roll the thing or pack after we get through seedin' it. And there…you don't seed very deep. An inch and a half, two inches. In matter of fact, you see a few roots on top of the ground.
ES: Now tell me why, since the roots are already here and you don't rotate every year, you don't just let these roots grow up again? Why do you have to reseed?
WH: We don't reseed these.
ES: Oh.
WH: Just every five years. Every time we pull out a field.
ES: So you're just talking about a new field of mint?
WH: Yeah. Yeah, this'll stay. Matter of fact, the sooner we can get if off we'll probably spray it again and then water to it and get some growth started.
ES: And how does it like the snow?
WH: Your roots will really smell good. But like I say…
ES: But do you have little chutes coming up by the time it snow come the falls?
WH: You have a little. Not too much.
ES: And would a very large amount of snow or a long freeze damage the roots?
WH: It can. We don't…been real lucky here with that what we call snow mold or that. It don't hurt the mint. Matter of fact, we had a hail storm here a couple years ago and it just looked like… It just stripped the…knocked the plants down. And we went ahead and fertilized again and watered it more and it came back. It didn't make the big crop, but we still got a crop off of it.
ES: What's snow mold?
WH: We predominantly get that on grain. It'd get covered and just cut the oxygens and all and then the plant'll start dyin'. And then you get…it just look like mold on the thing. It falls out, why, here you've got a green plant that's turned white and kinda like a mold on it. This year in Baker County they have a lot, especially in that Muddy Creek area, John. There's a lot of snow mold up there.
ES: So when that happens your crop is lost?
WH: Crop is lost. You reseed.
ES: Mm-hmm.
WH: And then in the fall the only bad thing on your lighter ground you don't get much up there and if you got wind then you've got soil erosion and lose a lot of…it can blow clear down to the deep that you seeded. That's why some of it's not put in 'til spring. But we've found this heavier ground we just can't hardly dig roots here, it's too heavy, and we need that lighter, sandy, ashier ground to grow roots on 'cause it digs easier and cleans up. A lot of our roots come out of Idaho. We get some from Imbler area. Bingman there he got some light soil.
ES: I thought you said you were using your own roots for seed?
WH: Very seldom. We usually buy roots.
ES: Oh you do?
WH: Mm-hmm.

ES: What would be wrong with yours?
WH: Just the idea of diggin' 'em and gettin' 'em.
ES: Oh. Too much work?
WH: We just get too much dirt with 'em. This ground…really you see here.
ES: Yeah. So you need lighter…
WH: Lighter, sandier, ashier ground we call it.
ES: Mm-hmm.
WH: We have dug several of ours, but it's not…not good diggin'. Hard on diggers. Half the…well, we got some one time from a neighbor here…from Phil Hassinger over here at the other side of the mountain. Nice roots. Stood the truck up and there's so much dirt in it they just stay there. They had to go shovel the dump truck out. And then you just get so much dirt and not enough roots they just don't seed good.
ES: Sounds to me as though I've got the complete story of mint, right?
WH: Hmm?
ES: Do I have the complete story or is there anything else?
WH: There's never no complete story 'cause there's always somethin' to ruin it.
ES: Alright. Any major thing you've left out?
WH: I left something out and that's…you better talk to the banker. [laughs] 'Cause you tie up…see, you buy an acre of roots roughly from a thousand to twelve hun…[end tape]